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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000496

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2018

TAGS: PREL ECIN PBTS AG MO

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR BELIEVES MOROCCO,S  
RAPPROCHEMENT PROPOSAL IS AIMED AT U.S. AND FRANCE

REF: A. ALGIERS 0555

1B. RABAT 0417

1C. RABAT 0401

1D. STATE 049768

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a two-hour exchange the Algerian Ambassador declined to identify what he referred to as many specific issues that prevent good relations between Algeria and Morocco. He opined, however, that the Moroccan proposal to re-open the border was designed to curry favor with the United States and France. He thought the Algerian Prime Minister's April visit to Tangier was positive and that backsliding must be avoided. He was careful to talk about the rights of the Sahrawi people rather than the Polisario. For our part, Ambassador Riley briefed the Algerian Ambassador and DCM on the evolution of U.S. policy on Western Sahara, our invitation to the Polisario and our desire to facilitate better Algerian-Moroccan relations and strengthen regional integration. End summary.

12. (C) On May 27, the Ambassador and DCM met with Algerian Ambassador Larbi Belkheir and Algerian DCM Boumedian Guennad for a two-hour exchange on Algerian-Moroccan relations and regional issues. The Ambassador started the conversation by asking about the Algerian Prime Minister's visit (Ref B). Belkheir, a former Minister of Interior and former Chief of Staff to the Algerian President, explained that he had gone to great lengths to get his Prime Minister to attend the 50th anniversary of the Tangiers Conference. In fact, he had even engaged the Government of Tunisia to persuade it to cancel a conference on the same theme. He emphasized that the Prime Minister had attended in his capacity as FLN leader and had not been upset by Moroccan Minister of State El Yazghi's diatribe about Western Sahara ) comments disavowed by other, embarrassed members of his own political party.

13. (C) Ambassador Belkheir continued by providing a historical perspective starting in the 1970s. He noted that the 1972 Ifrane Accord on border demarcation had never been implemented. Belkheir noted that the Algerian Government was deeply offended when the late King Hassan II proposed that the Islamist FIS be allowed to come to power as an experiment. As terrorism spread in Algeria, Morocco provided no assistance. Claims resulting from the 1993 expulsion of Algerians remain a bilateral issue. However, Hassan II and the Algerian President had met on the border in 1993 to avert a war between the two neighbors. Moreover, Morocco had never provided an explanation of the abrupt cancellation of the

planned June 2004 visit by the Algerian Prime Minister.

¶4. (C) Commenting on how much Western Sahara explains the strained relations, Belkheir said that Algeria had proposed autonomy plans leading to a popular vote in the past. Algeria had also arranged for Hassan II to meet with Polisario leader Abdelaziz in Oran in 1991.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Riley took the opportunity to explain the evolution of U.S. policy on Western Sahara (Ref D), emphasizing our invitation to the Polisario to meet USG officials in Washington, our urging the GOM to meet with the Polisario, our belief that an independent Western Sahara is unrealistic, and our efforts to improve Algeria's relations with Morocco and to strengthen regional cooperation through the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). Belkheir responded by asserting that there are people on both sides of the frontier who simply do not want good relations. He said that the GOA believes the recent Moroccan proposal to reopen the border and to address all other issues is a Moroccan effort to curry favor with France and the United States. As for the AMU, Belkheir asked rhetorically if all other AMU members would really like to see rapprochement between the two largest economies. He concluded that the important thing is to avoid any backsliding.

¶6. (C) Comment: Asked several times in several ways, what Algerian and Moroccan Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Interior might discuss, the 1993 claims and the Ifrane Accord were the only concrete things that Belkheir would identify, but this is more specific than he has been before and

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comports assessments we have heard from his staff and some Moroccans. Apart from mentioning the Polisario leader, Ambassador Belkheir scrupulously avoided mentioning the Polisario. Instead, he always spoke about the rights of the Sahrawi people. We believe that Belkheir's views accurately reflect Algerian policy as reported by Embassy Algiers. It remains up to the Moroccans to demonstrate the good faith of their proposals, perhaps by offering to address separately the specific issues highlighted by Belkheir, or by the Sahara-related gestures requested in Ref D. For the near term at least, the political calendar renders prospects for rapprochement bleak. The potential benefits, however, may make it still worth pursuing by the USG and other friends of the Maghreb countries. End comment.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Riley